



February 16, 2022

The Honorable Shane Pendergrass
Chair, House Health and Government Operations Committee
Room 241, House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

House Bill 408 [Statewide Targeted Overdose Prevention Act of 2022] - FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENT

Dear Chair Pendergrass and House Health and Government Operations Committee members,

Baltimore Harm Reduction Coalition (BHRC) is an advocacy organization that mobilizes community members for the health, dignity, and safety of people targeted by the war on drugs and anti-sex worker policies. As a certified Overdose Response Program, naloxone distributor, and syringe service program, we have provided essential health care services across the state for years. To expand upon the life-saving services provided by harm reduction programs across Maryland, BHRC supports House Bill 408 [Statewide Targeted Overdose Prevention (STOP) Act of 2022] in its attempts to ensure naloxone is more accessible for people who use opioids.

This bill is an essential next step in strengthening the public health and safety impact of Maryland's Overdose Response Program. Though the program has grown over the years, the Maryland Department of Health reports that there are still many health and human services organizations that provide regular services to people who use opioids but do not consistently distribute naloxone. If passed, HB408 will require a variety of healthcare and community service providers to develop a protocol to make naloxone available, free of charge, to program participants they know are at risk of experiencing an overdose. For this bill to truly have an effect, we hope that these protocols will not include making naloxone passively available, such as in a restroom that is often locked, but rather *actively* available through intentional service provision.

While we support the intentions of this bill, BHRC would like to see an amendment made to increase its effectiveness. Namely, to change the amount of time an agency must develop a naloxone protocol from 2 years to 1 year. As a small community-based organization, we understand that protocol development can be a strain on time and resources, and despite that cannot in good faith support such an extensive time to transition. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the pre-existing opioid overdose death fatality crisis has worsened. In Maryland, the number of opioid-related deaths increased by 20% between 2019 and 2020, and preliminary data indicates a continued increase in 2021. If we want to curb this increase we must be more proactive and reduce the delay.

In the midst of multiple public health crises, Marylanders deserve straightforward access to life-saving medication at all points in the continuum of care for people who use opioids. With that in mind, we ask that the Health and Government Operations Committee give HB408 a favorable report with amendment.

For more information about Baltimore Harm Reduction Coalition or our position, please contact our Director of Mobilization, Rajani Gudlavalleti at rajani@baltimoreharmreduction.org